

Conversation Guide: Talking with Students about Attendance, Grades K-5

Using this Guide

Attendance conversations provide a supportive space to explore student perspectives, identify barriers, and collaboratively develop practical solutions. Schools, districts, or any trusted adult can use the questions below to guide meetings with **students in grades K-5** about attendance. The facilitator should use open-ended questions, allow time for reflection, and keep the conversation strengths-based and focused on actionable strategies.

Example: *What are your thoughts about how important school is?*

Non-example: *Did you know you are required by law to go to school?*

STUDENT BACKGROUND

- Who is your favorite teacher/staff member? Why are they your favorite?
- What is your favorite thing to do or learn at school? Why is that your favorite?
- What are some things you're good at?
- What do you like to do when you're not at school?
- What is something new you'd like to try to get better at?
 - **Facilitator's note:** *If a student has trouble answering, facilitators can offer examples to spark ideas (i.e., "Some kids tell me they'd like to get better at reading, riding a bike, drawing, or playing a sport, etc. Is there something like that you'd like to try or practice more?"*

STUDENT SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

- How do your friends make school easier or more fun?
- What do your grown-ups at home do to help you get to school every day?
- How do you feel about your teachers?
- If you could change one thing about school, what would it be? How would this make your time at school better?
- What is one word that explains how you feel about our school?
- What parts of the school day feel hardest for you?

ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES

- Tell me about a day you didn't come to school. What did you do?
- Tell me about what you do to get ready for _____ (school, bedtime, etc.).
- What makes it hard for you to get to school in the morning? Why is that?
- Tell me about any jobs, chores, or other things that make it tricky to get to school.

- How do you feel on the days you come to school? How do you feel on the days you stay home?
 - **Facilitator’s note:** *After the student answers, facilitators can help them notice the difference between their feelings on days they come to school and days they stay home (i.e., “It sounds like you feel happy when you’re at school and a little bored at home,” or “I hear that coming to school makes you feel excited. Can you tell me more about why that is?” This can help the student connect their feelings to their attendance experience.*

SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORTS

- What can your teachers or other adults do to make school feel better for you?
- What’s the easiest way for you to learn new things? Do you like reading, listening, practicing, etc.?
- Think of a time someone helped you feel better at school. What did they do that was helpful?
- Who at school do you like talking to when you’re having a hard day?
- Tell me about anything at school that feels tricky or hard for you.

Building a Strengths-Based Attendance Plan

Close this conversation by working with the student to turn the insights they shared into a practical plan for improving attendance. Keep the approach positive and solution-focused, highlighting the family’s strengths and ideas while ensuring the dialogue remains constructive and supportive.

SUGGESTED REFLECTION PROMPTS

- What can we do together to help you get to school more?
- What’s one thing you can try right now?
- How can we check if our ideas are helping?

NOTES: